



Lessons Learned: What Horses Teach us about Leadership



Advanced Cross-Culture Leadership Program



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Horses communicate through Body Language

While horses can use verbal communication, they use it for calling, the most is non-verbal communication.

These are some of the ways that a horse communicates:

Ears

Head Carriage

Forelegs

Hind Legs

Muzzle

Eyes

Tail



Ears

Horse Body Language

Turned out to the side

Turned back

Rapidly swiveling



Head Carriage

Horse Body Language

Lowered

Elevated

Snaking



Legs

Horse Body Language

Standing splayed

Pawing

Stomping

Striking

Cocked

Raised



Muzzle

Horse Body Language

Drooping lip or slack mouth

Chewing

Clacking teeth

Flared nostrils

Gaping mouth with visible teeth



Eyes

Horse Body Language

Tension

Rapid darting

Whites of the eyes showing



Tail

Horse Body Language

Raised

Flagged

Clamped Down



Approach

Definition

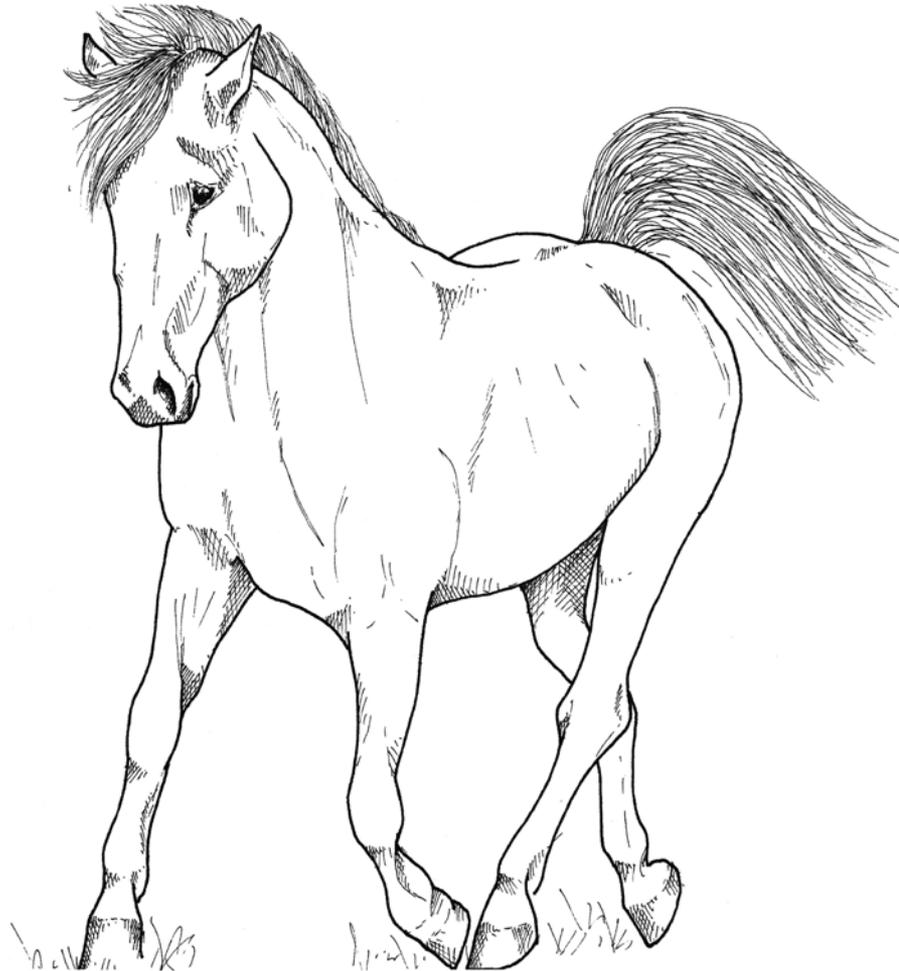
A goes towards B reducing the distance between them

Variations

A holds its head high or low, dilates its nostrils, feeds or stops during its movements towards B.

A (stallion) whinnies, prances, tosses its head or moves its tail.

A (mare) whinnies at her newborn foal.



Context

Approaches are very common, happen in a variety of contexts and usually lead to close-range interactions. These are often of non-aggressive nature. A horse may, however, simply approach another and feed or rest nearby, and movements like this contribute to maintain the spatial integrity of groups.

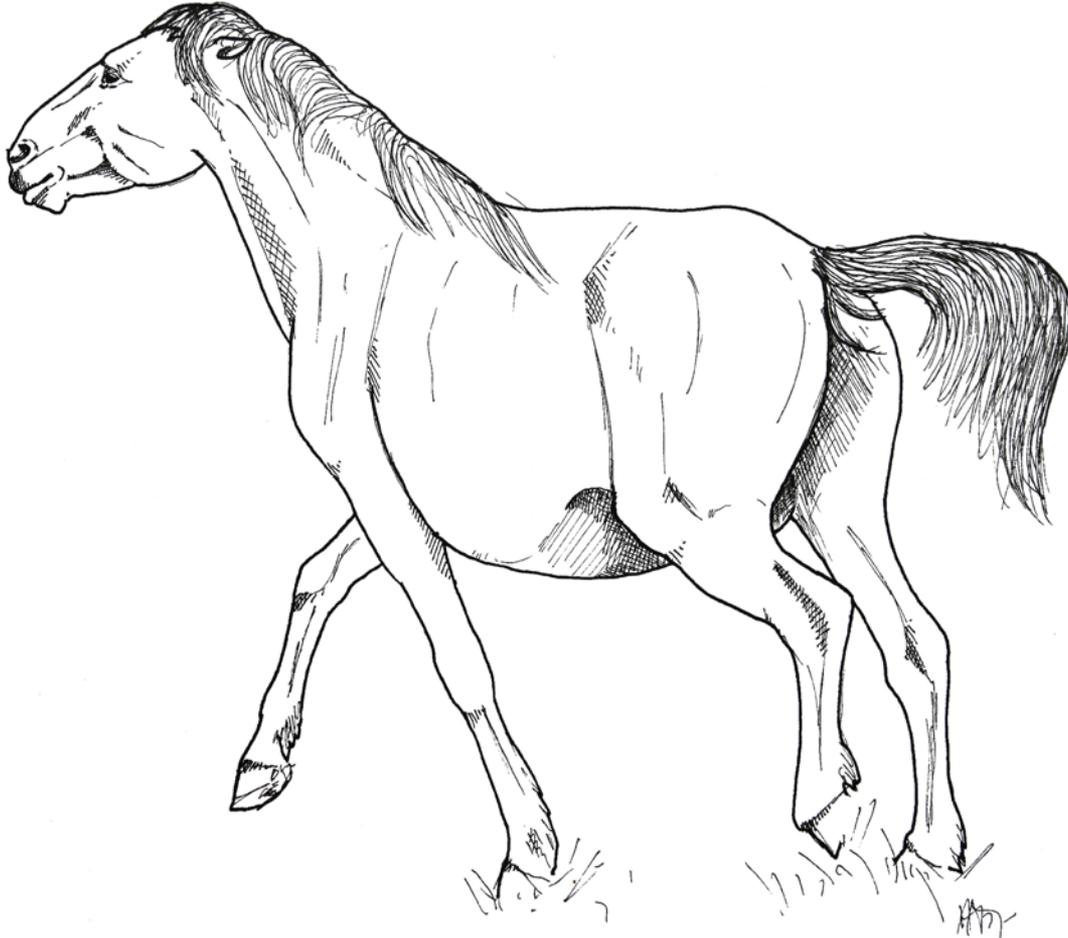
Attack

Definition

A makes a sudden forward movement towards B with ears laid back, the muscles of the muzzle contracted and the neck and head stretched towards B. If B moves away, A does not pursue more than a few steps.

Variations

A makes a few rapid steps in walking, trotting or cantering. A attempts or succeeds in biting or kicking B. A lashes its tail or squeals.



Context

In a variety of aggressive contexts like stallion displays and fights. Mares often attack horses which approach their young foals. A stallion will also attack sub adults, more often males than females, in his band. A horse often attacks the subordinate which infringes its individual distance.

Avoid

Definition

A moves deliberately to keep away from B who is not actively interacting with A.

Variations

A walks, trots or canters. The ears are held sideways. A feeds whilst walking.



Context

A is hierarchically inferior to B and is avoiding a possible close-range interaction with B. Avoidance occurs often in the field, but is rather inconspicuous and therefore often overlooked.

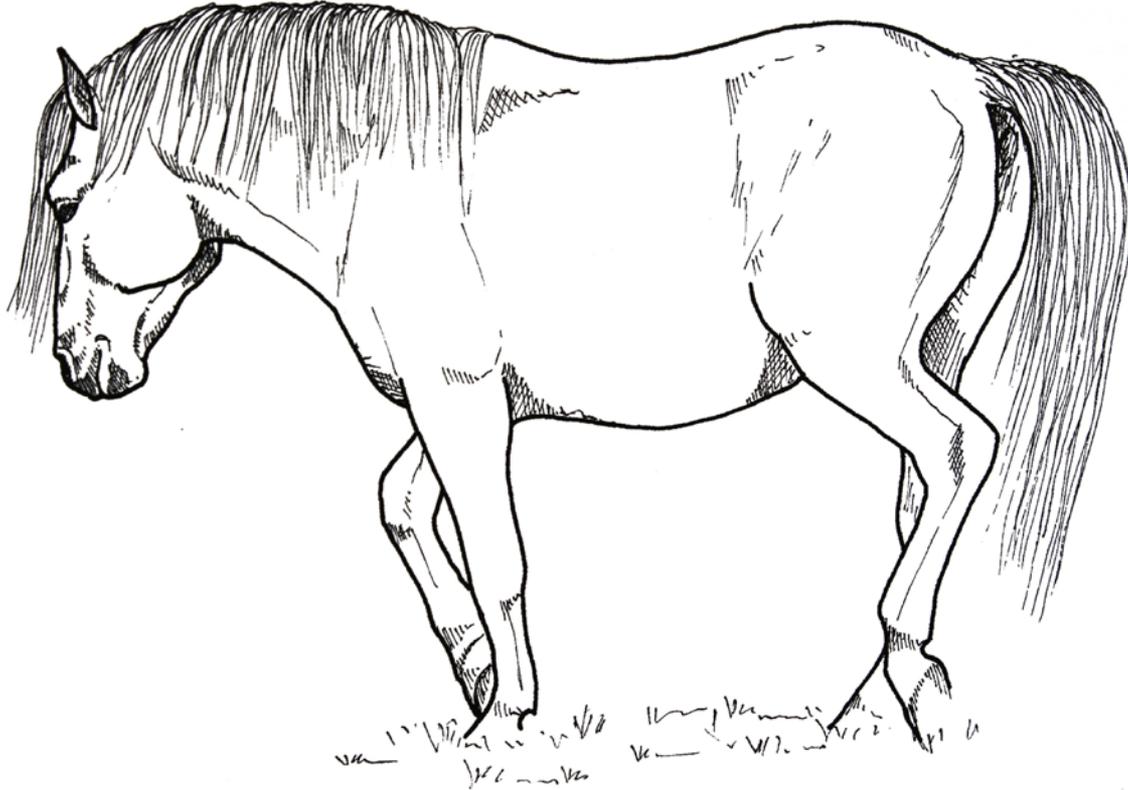
Back up

Definition

A steps backwards with the following leg sequence: left hind leg, left foreleg, right hind leg, right foreleg.

Variations

One to three or more steps are taken.



Context

A horse may react to a frontal aggressive act by backing up. Sometimes horses need to back up in order to get out of an impasse, for example after drinking at a steep bank or in a narrow place.

Bite threat

Definition

A lays ears flat back, contracts the muscle of the muzzle, pulls back the corners of the mouth and opens the mouth.

Variations

A attempts but fails to bite B. The teeth are visible, they are closed with a snap. A attacks, chases, head-swings or lashes its tail



Context

Any dominant horse may bite threat a subordinate particularly if the latter failed to react to a head-swing or drive. Bite threats often occur during stallion fights, when a stallion tries to eject a young horse, usually a male, from his band or when a mare makes other horses move away from her foal.

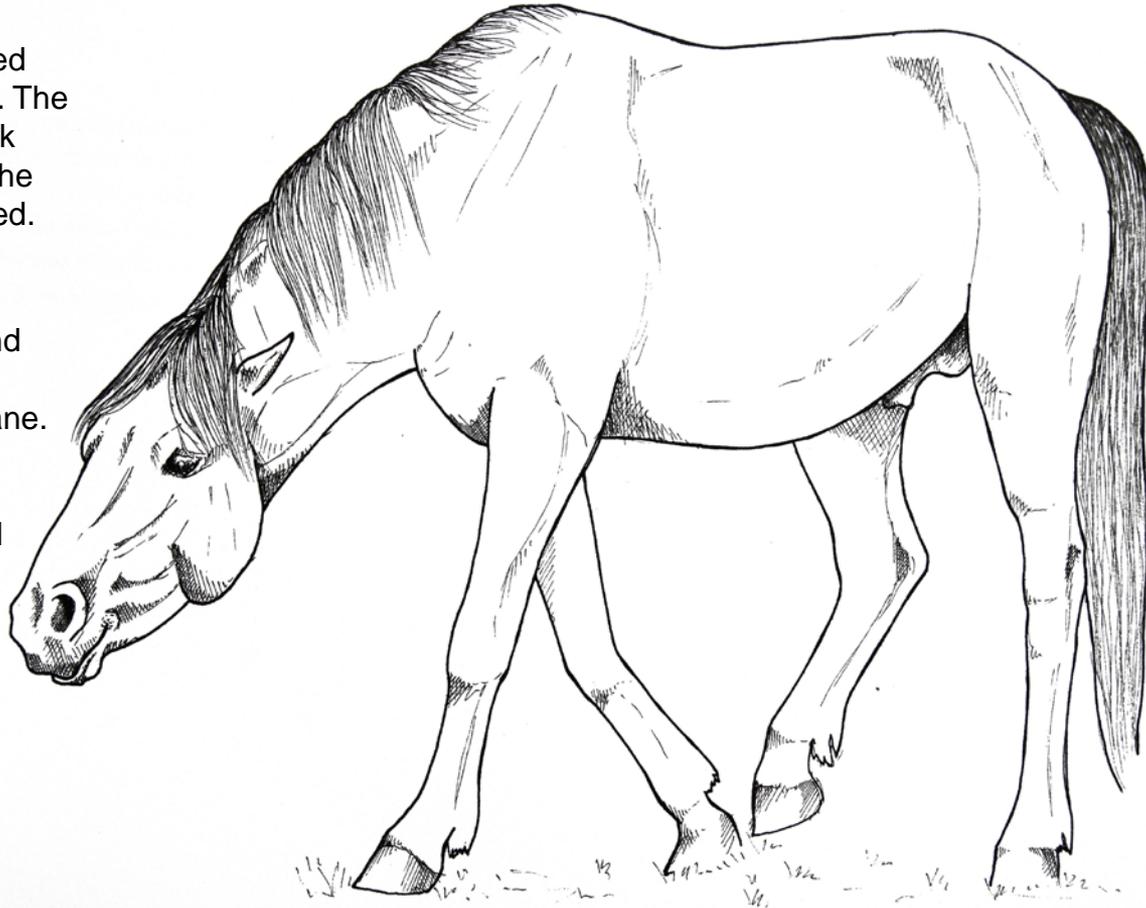
Drive

Definition

A moves towards B with its head and neck extended and lowered below the horizontal. The ears are laid flat back and the muscles of the muzzle are contracted.

Variations

A swings its neck and head in the vertical and/or horizontal plane. The nose almost touches the ground, with the head turned up at the atlas. A walks, trots, canters or gallops and changes gaits. The white of the eyes is visible. Driving bouts are interspersed with following bouts.



Context

Driving is shown almost exclusively by a stallion towards mares and members of his band. A stallion may attempt or succeed in reducing the spread of his band. He may drive a horse or horses away from another stallion or from danger.

Ears laid back

Definition

A has its ears back and tenses its facial muscles without moving its head or neck in direction of B.

Variations

A is standing, walking or lying up.



Context

Ears laid back is the mildest form of aggression and occurs in a variety of contexts. It is particularly often shown by a resting horse when other horses create some commotion nearby.

Follow

Definition

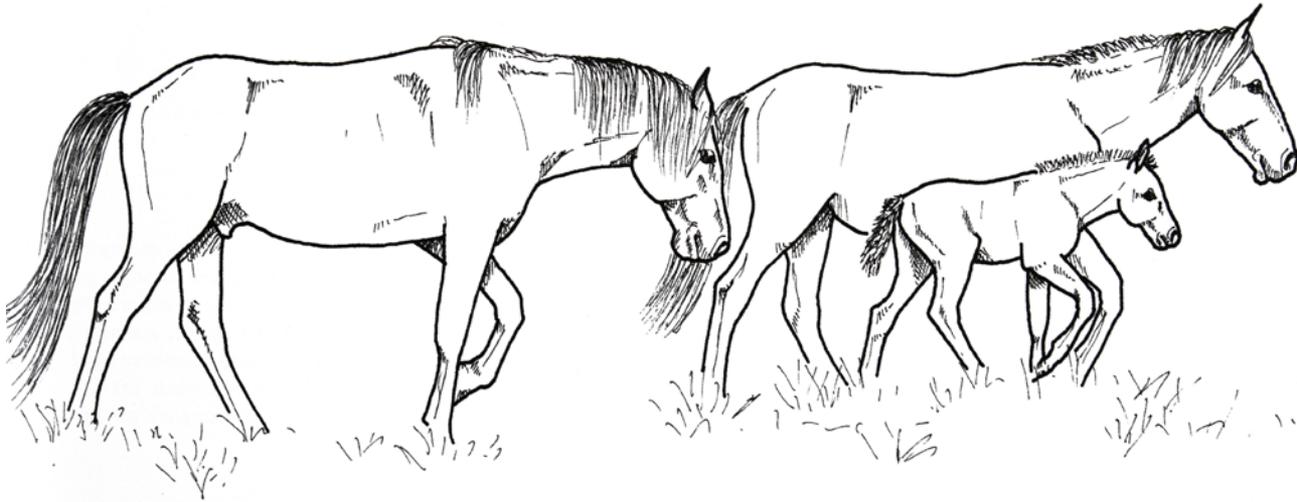
A follows B, and its movements are governed by the direction and speed of B. A does not lay back its ears.

Variations

A walks, trots, canters, gallops.

A touches B (nose-body, head-body, body-body contact).

A (male) nips B (male). Following is momentarily interrupted by maintenance or grooming activities or by interactions between A and B



Context

When a group of horses travel from one place to another, the individuals often follow each other in a given order. A mare is usually followed by her youngest offspring who in turn is followed by his elder sibling. During play fights, males often have one or more following bouts

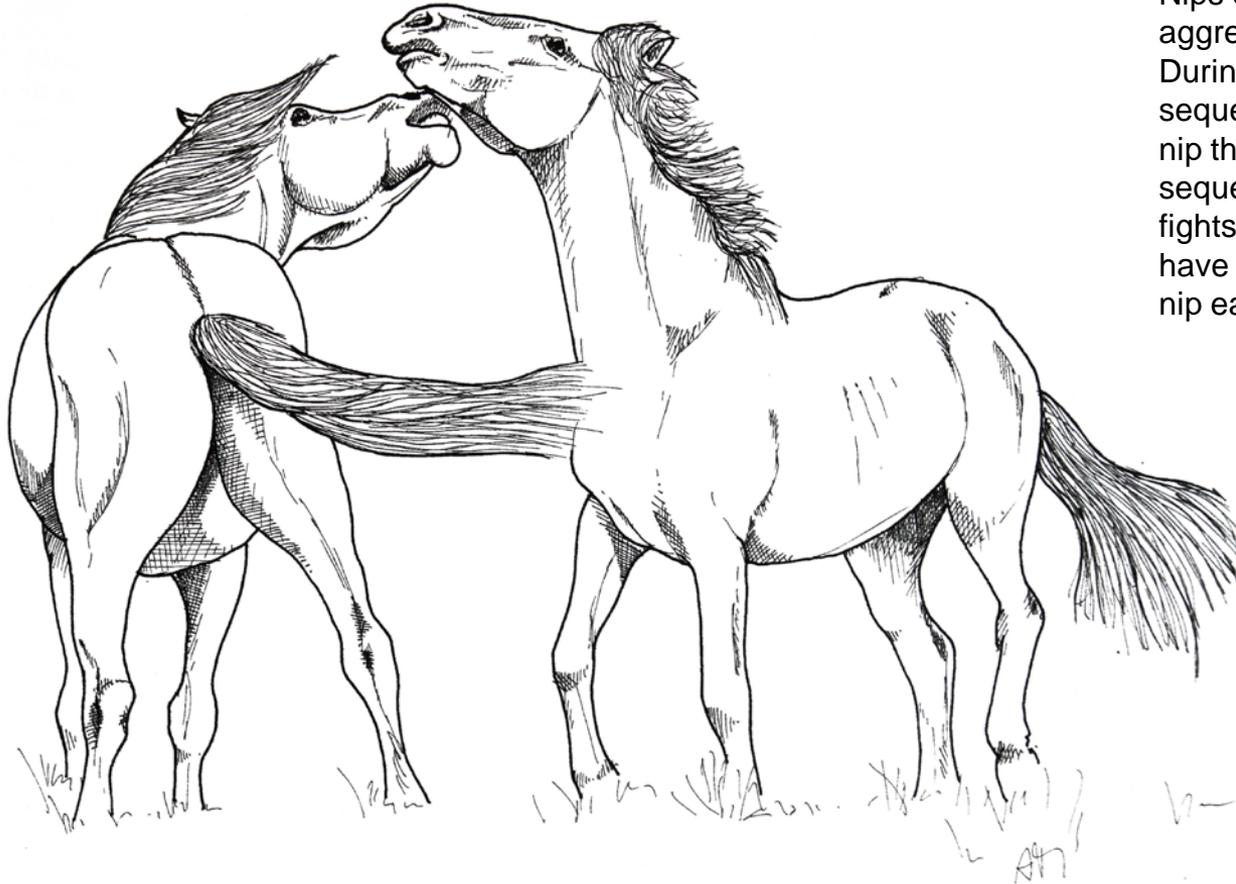
Nip

Definition

A opens its mouth a little and grasps a fold of B's skin with its incisors. The skin is almost immediately pulled out from between A's teeth.

Variations

A exposes a small part of its incisors.
A nips B's head, neck, side or legs.
A nips repeatedly.
A or B can terminate the nip.
A (male) and B (male) nip each other alternatively. A nips B whilst rearing circling, stand resting.



Context

Nips occur only in non aggressive contexts. During a copulative sequence, a stallion may nip the mare early in the sequence. During play fights two males always have bouts in which they nip each other.

What Horses Teach about Leadership

Horse Body Language

Leadership to horses is about **RESPECT**, not fear.

Old school Leadership: through fear & submission

Leadership through **fear and intimidation** resolves in:

- Detachment
- Stressful environment – Walking around on eggshells
- Fearful and suppressed subordinates

Leadership through **mutual respect** resolves in:

- Attachments
- Open environment where ideas can be expressed
- Loyal and motivated subordinates



What Horses Teach about Leadership

Horse Body Language

Body Language

- Not only brute strength, but the smallest flick of an ear can move an entire herd

Group Leadership

- Horses are social animals, and their safety and security is tied to the herd. The herd decides where to move, drink and eat. Everyone in the herd knows who the leader is.

Authenticity

- There is no ego in the herd. No social position, title or qualification makes you the leader. It is purely authenticity.

Change

- They are highly adaptable to different and new environments.



What Horses Teach about Leadership

Horse Body Language

How do you lead through mutual respect?

- Be consistent
- Clear
- Listen to and promote people
- Do what you say
- Mean what you say

You cannot let your horse – or your team – push you around.
If you do not provide the leadership, the horse will.



What Horses Teach about Leadership

Horse Body Language

When you approach a horse, they are asking themselves two questions.

1. **Can I trust you?**
2. **Can you lead me?**

Question: What are you doing currently to answer yes to those two questions for your current employees?

What can you do to answer yes to those 2 questions for new recruits?



What Horses Teach about Forces & Drivers

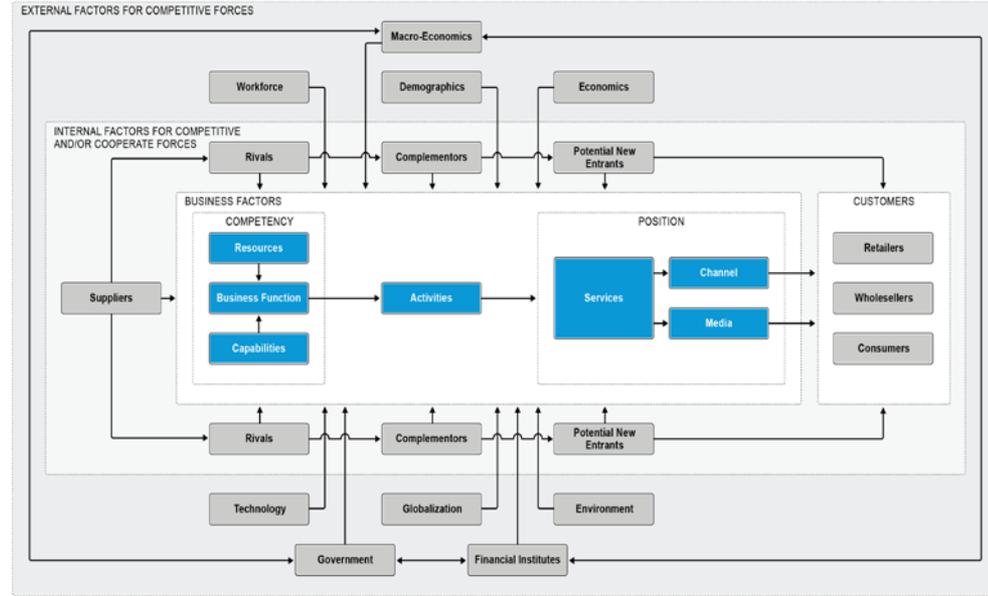
Horse Body Language

Being Aware, Alert and Adaptable is key to leadership.

Horses are always aware

They'll use their senses to search for food or travel further afield to find the sustenance they need.

This lesson that we learn from the horse helps us to be aware of the environment we are in.



QUESTIONS?

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Thank You

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